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# What Would Yoda Do? A “Jedi” Approach to Curriculum Development

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### ***What would Yoda do?***

### ***A 'Jedi' Approach to Curriculum Development***

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### **Introduction**

A recent 'call for submissions' by the *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, prompted three of us interested in the influence of 'the digital culture' on curriculum and pedagogy to discuss how we might contribute to this conversation. Individually, we work in our various contexts (schools, school districts and university settings) to navigate the amorphous digital culture in ways that allow us to integrate emerging technologies into our classroom in purposeful ways.

The flexible responses accepted for this call encouraged us to think about the rich learning that we engage in with our online professional learning networks (PLNs). In a recent discussion paper, Veletsianos<sup>1</sup> argues that,

participation in online spaces (e.g., communities and networks of practice<sup>3</sup>) is becoming increasingly important and absence from these spaces can be detrimental to scholarship, practice and personal and professional development... participatory scholarship enables scholars to stay current in their research field, explore new approaches to teaching from their colleagues, engage with individuals mentioning their research/work, and expose their work to larger audiences. (p. 2)

With that in mind, we each invited members of our respective PLNs to respond to a question via Twitter, thereby leveraging our various social networks in ways that embody cultural participation and co-creation. As such, all respondents will be viewed not as 'subjects' of a study but as co-authors of the resulting project.

### **Our Question**

In order to create a "challenging focus" to stimulate the reconceptualization of existing practices and structures, we chose to consider the status of professional development in education.<sup>2</sup> As educators who have worked in elementary/secondary classroom and teacher education settings, we respect the

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<sup>1</sup> Veletsianos, G. (2010). Participatory scholars and scholarship. Instructional Technology Curriculum and Instruction, The University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved [http://www.veletsianos.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/participatory\\_scholars\\_scholarship\\_veletsianos.pdf](http://www.veletsianos.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/participatory_scholars_scholarship_veletsianos.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> (Katz, S. & Earl, L. (2006/07). Creating new knowledge: Evaluating networked learning communities. *Education Canada*, 47(1), 34-37).

powerful role that modeling and learning through creative and participatory practices<sup>3</sup> can play. Our question then was, *What Would Yoda Do?*

## Methodology

We were curious to learn what insights web 2.0 enabled practices might offer us to “support, document, and design more engaging, media-rich, expanded contexts for learning over time”.<sup>4</sup> In keeping with the spirit of embodied practice, we decided to mash-up and remix Tweets<sup>5</sup> with images licensed by Creative Commons on Flickr (Stormtroopers 365)<sup>6</sup> to create a slideshare program. We collaborated via Google Docs<sup>7</sup> on a common set of instructions to post on each of our blogs.<sup>8</sup> Each of the initial contributors then issued an invitation to their PLNs via Twitter that included a link to the details found on their respective blogs.

Respondents were asked to view the images and consider a caption for one or more pictures that reflects ‘pet peeves’ with professional development experiences and/or possibilities for re-imagining professional development that is intellectually engaging. They were then invited to tweet a link to the selected image along with their caption, (grouping them with by including the hashtag ‘#wwyd’) to either @thecleversheep, @benhazard or @khibbert.

## Results:

In a study exploring alternatives to the training model, Judith Warren Little<sup>9</sup> argues that the “most promising forms of professional development engage teachers in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems and curiosities....[and] communicate a view of teachers ...as productive and

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<sup>3</sup> Greenhow, C., Robelia, B. & Hughes, J.E. (2009). Learning, teaching and scholarship in a digital age. *Educational Researcher*, 38(4), 251.

<sup>4</sup> Greenhow, C., Robelia, B. & Hughes, J.E. (2009). Learning, teaching and scholarship in a digital age. *Educational Researcher*, 38(4), 251.

<sup>5</sup> Twitter™ <http://twitter.com/>

<sup>6</sup> Stephan, *Stormtroopers 365* Retrieved <http://www.flickr.com/photos/st3f4n/sets/72157616350171741/show/>

<sup>7</sup> Google Docs <http://docs.google.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Blog Posts: <http://thecleversheep.blogspot.com/>; <http://benhazard.com/>; and <http://thesaltychip.edublogs.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Little, J. W. (1993). Teacher professional development in a climate of educational reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 15(2), 129-151.

responsible members of a broader community”(p. 133). Four ‘principles’ of teacher professional development emerged that we have adapted to organize the contributions of our PLN co-authors. We note that these principles are not unlike the fundamental principles that guide us in our interactions with our students:

1. Professional development must offer meaningful intellectual, social, and emotional engagement with ideas, materials and colleagues;
2. Professional development takes explicit account of the contexts of teachers and the experiences of others;
3. Professional development respects critical thinking and informed dissent;
4. Professional development places classroom practice in the larger context of school practice.

### **Discussion: *From our community to yours***

Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes (2009) have suggested that when the focus is on the learner –in this case teachers—we have an opportunity to observe how “what they suggest intersects with, supports, or suggests desired competencies, teaching practices, and policies.”<sup>10</sup> As we reviewed the sentiments shared by 137 respondents over the course of one week, we noted some familiar themes, confirming recent claims that “Teachers have long perceived professional development, though well intentioned, to be fragmented, disconnected, and irrelevant to the real problems of their classroom practice”<sup>11</sup>.

Research investigating the ways in which teachers come to understand their practice in virtual learning environments has been instructive in this regard. When teacher knowledge (often tacit) is made explicit and shared, teachers are able to more easily critique their own and others’ practice, enabling them to collaboratively generate improvements, refinements or new knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Further, Wenger has observed that learning is social, occurring through practice, within communities of practice.<sup>13</sup> This participatory activity revealed that captions often served to provoke, challenge, confirm and build upon ideas. Rather than offer our own interpretations of what was shared and prescriptions for your practice, we invite you to actively reflect upon the contributions of our ‘co-authors’ on the subsequent slides with your own professional learning networks. What do the responses suggest to you about the current status of professional development as they relate to your experiences? Does the format (remixed tweets and images) embedding humour and poignant critique at times – help or hinder your ability to critically

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<sup>10</sup> Greenhow, C., Robelia, B. & Hughes, J.E. (2009). Learning, teaching and scholarship in a digital age. *Educational Researcher*, 38(4), 255.

<sup>11</sup> Lieberman, A. & Pointer Mace, D. (2010) Making practice public: Teacher learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1/2), 77.

<sup>12</sup> Hibbert, K. (2002). Don't steal the struggle! Commercialization of literacy and its impact on the 'good teacher'. *Talking Points*, 13 (2), 2-5; Hibbert, K. (2005). *Examining 'enunciative space' in an online community of practice*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, London, Ontario.

<sup>13</sup> Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

examine the status quo or imagine professional development that engages teachers intellect in creative and powerful ways? In what ways might collaborative, dialogic communities of practice re-ignite teacher agency, too often silences in the dominant training culture of ‘efficiency’?

According to Katz (2008), “in social operating systems, the emphasis on data and information is equal to or replaced by a new emphasis on creating, developing and sustaining human relationships”.<sup>14</sup> In the quest for open learning, we invite you to continue the dialogue; sharing the outcome of your discussions with the PLNs who began this process via Twitter. You can find us, as always, online.

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Greenhow, C., Robelia, B. & Hughes, J.E. (2009). Learning, teaching and scholarship in a digital age. *Educational Researcher*, 38(4), 255.